

VZCZCXRO4287
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #1039/01 0961230
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 051230Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6648
INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001039

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/05/2018

TAGS: [IR](#) [IZ](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER: IRAN WILL ESCALATE CONFRONTATION
WITH US IN IRAQ

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[11](#). (S) SUMMARY. During a March 31 meeting, Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari - just off the plane from the Arab League Summit in Damascus - told Ambassador Crocker, MNF-I CG GEN David Petraeus, NSC Senior Director McGurk and PolMil Minister Counselor Ambassador Marcie Ries that Iran had settled on a policy of increased confrontation with the United States in Iraq. Zebari added that Iran was expanding support for the Sadr trend because it was unhappy with ISCI's acquiescence of the SFA/SOFA process. Zebari agreed that a united GOI had to condemn Iranian involvement in the violence that is currently engulfing the capital and southern parts of Iraq, and promised to press senior leadership to sign a statement to that effect. According to Zebari, the Damascus Arab League Summit went reasonably well for the hosts, but, in the absence of a Lebanese delegation, did not raise that country's problems once. END SUMMARY.

IRAN LEADERSHIP DECIDES TO ESCALATE CONFRONTATION WITH U.S.
IN IRAQ

[12](#). (S) Zebari reported that after his March 2-3 visit to Iraq, Iranian President Ahmadinejad lobbied Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamani for complete control of the Iraq portfolio, arguing that he had successfully guided Iran's nuclear confrontation with the United States - crowned by the December 2007 NIE - and that he could duplicate the feat in Iraq. Zebari said Coalition kinetic activities were having a substantial effect on Iranian activities but Iran remained determined to increase its influence by getting IRGC-QF members into Iraq, under diplomatic cover or by other means, and by using militias to intensify proxy confrontations with the United States. The trilateral round was, according to Zebari, a tactical move to keep the United States off-balance.

[13](#). (S) Zebari mentioned that because Iran is unhappy with ISCI's acquiescence in the SFA/SOFA process, it was increasing support to the Sadr trend and training 1500 mid-level Jaysh Al Madhi officers in Iran. Zebari said that CoR Dawa Bloc leader Ali al Adib and CoR Defense Committee Chairman and Badr strongman Hadi al Amri, both recently returned from Qum, reported that Iran was involved in brokering a 9-point deal with Moqtada al Sadr, but whether he exercised effective control over the Sadr trend remained an open question. The Awakening movements preoccupy Tehran, which intended to quash them should they appear in the South, attack those already established in Sunni areas of mid-Iraq, and support those in the North to the extent they stoke Sunni/Kurdish tensions and provide Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) additional recruiting grounds. GEN Petraeus seized on this and warned Zebari that Kurdish encroachment, particularly in areas west of Mosul that are non-contiguous to the KRG, was forcing local Sunni populations into AQI's orbit and was one of MNF-I's chief concerns in Ninevah province.

[14](#). (S) Zebari assessed the GOI had begun Southern

operations without adequate intelligence and logistical preparation and that the move had backfired across southern Iraq. Iran would manipulate the crisis to "Lebanize" southern Iraq. GEN Petraeus noted that Prime Minister Maliki had a less than well-developed plan for his Basrah operation and had not been well served by some of his advisors. Citing Adib and Amri's trip to Qom, President Talabani's KRG meetings with IRGC-QF Chief Suleimani, and Vice President Abdel Mehdi's upcoming meetings in Iran, the CG said the USG was puzzled by the range of GOI contacts with Tehran since the beginning of Basrah hostilities. Too many high-level GOI officials were speaking to Iran without having spoken to each other. Ambassador Crocker noted that far from speaking with one voice to Tehran, the GOI appeared unable even to agree on a meeting place where senior GOI leadership could discuss the current crisis. Zebari agreed to push senior GOI leadership to produce a signed common statement condemning Iranian interference in Iraq before April 8-9 Congressional testimony to Congress.

DAMASCUS SUMMIT

¶5. (S) Zebari assessed the July 29-30 Arab League Summit had been "successful" for Syria, with Lebanon the only absent member and respectable (11 of 22) Head of State-level turnout, particularly from North Africa. In Lebanon's absence, the Summit had not raised the issue at all. There had been some tense moments nonetheless. In the final communique, the Syrians modified the Summit's supportive Iraq resolution and would not amend it after the Iraqi delegation complained. Libyan President Qadaffi's statements about Saddam Hussein strained discussions between the two delegations. The Syrians chided the Iraqis for not doing more for refugees and in a closed session, Arab League

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president Amr Moussa predicted the United States would invade Iran.
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